



Greetings

This is the fourth Planning Update from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intended to keep you informed and involved in the Service's planning process for protecting wetland and associated upland habitats in Tulare Basin. Your input is very important. It helps us gather information and identify issues important to you, your community, and the natural resources of the Tulare Basin.

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Canada Geese goslings. USFWS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tulare Basin Land Protection Planning Study

Planning Update 4, September 2004



Private Wetland, Scott Frazer USFWS

The Land Protection Planning Documents are Available

The Proposed Tulare Basin Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan are available for public review and comment. A summary of the alternatives presented in the Environmental Assessment is on page 4. Information on how you may make your views on the planning documents known, is on page 5. We would like to hear your ideas and comments on the WMA proposal. Comments on the documents are due October 29, 2004.



Review the Planning Documents and past Planning Updates on our Website:
<http://pacific.fws.gov/planning>

E-mail your comments to:
FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov
Please use "Tulare Basin" in the subject.



Why Propose a Tulare Basin WMA?

The need to protect private wetlands in the Tulare Lake Basin is a result of tremendous habitat losses that continue to adversely affect waterfowl and migratory bird resources. Historically, Tulare Lake was the largest freshwater wetland west of the Mississippi River. Despite substantial losses of wetland habitats within the Tulare Basin, the area is recognized by the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture (CVHJV) and in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) for its international importance in the life cycle of migratory waterfowl and shorebirds of North America's Pacific Flyway.

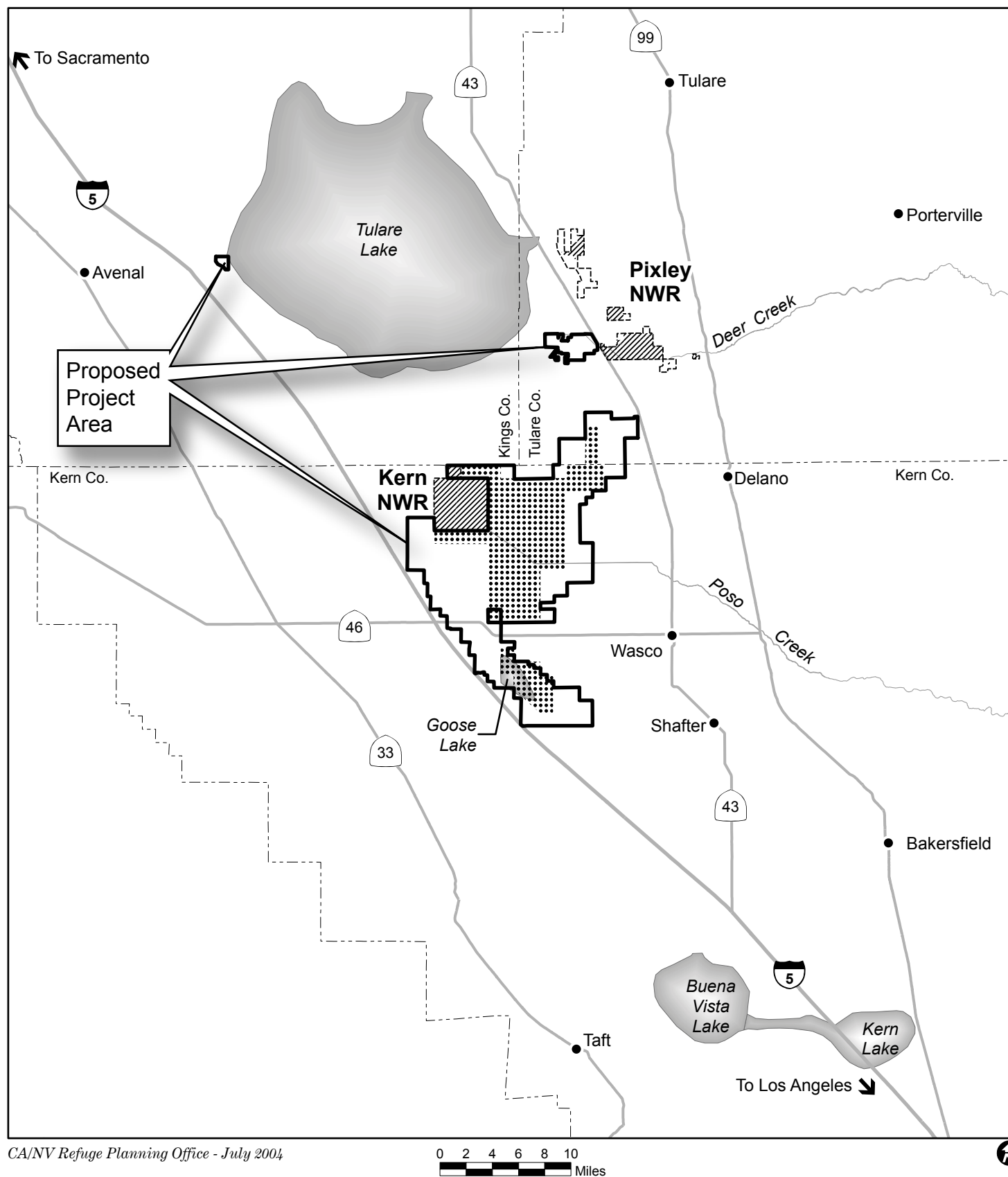
What Is The Purpose of Establishing the Tulare Basin WMA?

The purpose of this proposal is to: (1) protect key habitats for wetland dependant and sensitive species in support of the NAWMP and its CVHJV goals for Tulare Basin and (2) support long term viability of private wetlands in Tulare Basin.

While most of the San Joaquin Valley is developed and intensively farmed, the project area contains the best remaining wildlife habitats. Within the Tulare Basin focus area, which includes ducks clubs and wetlands with a priority for protection, 70 percent of the land is considered to be high quality wildlife habitat. Most of the native lands in the Tulare Basin are dry uplands associated with varying amounts of wetland habitats. These native habitats are valuable to seven threatened and endangered species, and large populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other migratory birds. Early migrant waterfowl, most notably northern pintail ducks, have a long history of using wetlands in the Tulare Basin. Retaining the existing private wetlands and having opportunities for future restoration projects is necessary to meet migratory bird population objectives. The proposed habitat protection efforts would have positive effects on bird distribution and winter survival locally as well as regionally.

The proposed project area is located in northern Kern, southern Tulare and an isolated portion of Kings Counties near Kern and Pixley National Wildlife Refuges. This area is close to the south shore of the historic Tulare Lake in the southern San Joaquin Valley, California. Two transportation corridors frame the west and east boundaries of the proposed project area, Interstate 5 and Highway 99, respectively. The proposed WMA occupies low lying lands near Goose Lake in the south to land near Pixley Refuge in the north (see map on page 3).

Proposed Tulare Basin WMA Project Area





Summary of the Alternatives

Alternative 1 - No Action. The No Action Alternative represents no change from the existing management of lands in the project area. Under this alternative, the Service would not acquire interests in the lands within the project area for the purpose of establishing the Tulare Basin WMA. Without landowner incentives to preserve the land's natural habitat characteristics, it is likely that land use conversion would continue to occur. If existing habitats are not protected from conversion or development, waterfowl and shorebirds would be crowded onto other wetlands or use agricultural drain water reservoirs which are poor quality habitat. The stress of adverse weather and limited habitat conditions could contribute to disease outbreaks in these birds.

Alternative 2 - 14,000-Acre WMA. Under Alternative 2, the Service would identify a conservation easement project area of approximately 109,000 acres. Within this large project area, there are many small, privately-owned tracts of wetland and associated upland habitats that could be protected as part of the WMA, through a conservation easement program. Some of these habitats are surrounded by land that would not be appropriate to include in the WMA, which is why the Service would limit its easement acquisition program to 14,000 acres within the project area. This alternative proposes to protect wetland dependant wildlife and native habitats solely through acquisition of perpetual conservation easements. With the protection of these lands the Service would be contributing to protection and recovery of migratory waterfowl populations, shorebirds, landbirds, and neotropical migratory birds of North America's Pacific Flyway. Some benefits may be obtained for federally listed threatened and endangered species residing in associated upland habitats as well.

Alternative 3 - 16,000-Acre WMA (Preferred Alternative). Alternative 3 includes 14,000 acres of easement lands identified in Alternative 2, plus an area not to exceed 2,000 acres protected through potential fee acquisition or optional conservation easements. All 16,000 acres could be protected via easements if willing landowners choose to participate. Lands considered for fee acquisition would exhibit high quality or unique habitat values, or key habitat locations that connect similar areas of high quality habitat. Several landowners adjacent to wetlands, proposed including properties that meet those conditions.

What Would a Tulare Basin WMA Mean to Landowners?

Establishing a WMA, would provide an opportunity for landowners within the WMA boundary to sell conservation easements to the Service at fair market value, while preserving important wildlife habitat and California's open space and agricultural and rural life style. The Service would acquire easements only from landowners who are willing sellers. Landowners would not be obligated to participate in the easement program.



How Do I Review the Planning Documents?

Included with this Planning Update is a compact disk containing the Tulare Basin land protection planning documents. The planning documents can also be reviewed on the Service's website at <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning>. The planning documents are also available for review at Kern National Wildlife Refuge, 10811 Corcoran Road, Delano, CA, and the following libraries.

Kern County Library	Kings County Library	Tulare County Library
701 Truxtun Ave.	401 North Douty	200 West Oak St.
Bakersfield, CA 93301	Hanford, CA 93230	Visalia, CA 93291

Tulare Basin Wildlife Management Area Land Protection Planning Study Schedule

<u>Planning Step</u>	<u>Target Date</u>
Planning Update 1 Issued	Completed
Public Workshop	Completed
Planning Update 2 Issued	Completed
Planning Update 3 Issued	Completed
Planning Update 4 Issued	Completed
Draft Documents Released and Public Comment Period Begins	September 2004
Public Comment Period Ends	October 29, 2004
Final Documents and Notice of Decision released by	Fall 2004

How Do I Provide Comments?

We would like to hear from you on the proposal to establish a WMA. If you wish to share your concerns, comments, and questions, please send them to Scott or Richard at:

For Information on the
National Wildlife Refuge
System Contact:
Dave Hardt, Project Leader
Kern National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 670
Delano, CA 93216
Phone: 661 725-2767
Fax: 661 725-6041

Scott Frazer
Refuge Operations Specialist
Kern National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 670
Delano, CA 93216
Phone: 661 725-2767
Fax: 661 725-6041

Richard Smith
Natural Resource Specialist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
CA/NV Refuge Planning Office
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1619
Sacramento, CA 95825
Phone: 916 414-6502 Fax: 916 414-6500

You can send comments via e-mail to: FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov
Please use "Tulare Basin" in the subject.